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Is it you or your company?

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By [Deborah Daily](#), Co-founder & President, Buckaroo Marketing | New Media



It's not unusual for business owners to have healthy egos. It takes a great deal of confidence to launch and guide a business through the ups and downs. Unfortunately, egos can inflate into so much self-confidence it impedes success.

I thought about that after I concluded a conversation with a business owner who responded to my question about why his company's customers turned to them. "Honestly, they do business with my company because they want to do business with me," was his reply.

I've heard similar responses frequently over the years. On the one hand, that's not unusual – especially when I'm speaking with the founder. That individual often personifies the business. The simple fact is that a company's reputation can't – and shouldn't – be all about one person. Oh, sure, that one person can be a tremendous inspiration, a great leader, or a skilled manager. For a company to thrive, though, it has to transcend the individuals behind it. As people say, the whole has to be bigger than the sum of the parts.

Otherwise, the company's prospects depend completely on your presence and direct involvement. Your reputation outshines the company's. No matter how well you hire, your presence will overshadow everything and everyone. People will assume the company's collective expertise is limited to what's stored between your ears.

Even if the idea you're the reason customers choose your company is untrue and just a product of your ego, employees and customers alike are going to sense it in your behavior and hear it in your words. It's hard for employees to feel confident in their own knowledge or want to feed their own growth when your image always looms over them. Wondering why your team doesn't demonstrate more initiative? Why they're afraid to make decisions on their own? A look in the mirror might provide a clue.

If you're a company founder who genuinely believes you're the secret to your company's success, you're also financially shortchanging yourself and your team. How? There will come a day when you're ready to make your exit, and you'll expect to be rewarded for all the sweat equity and heart you put into the company. What you started will be worth a whole lot more at that moment if it's a company with its own reputation. Put another way, if your company's reputation hinges primarily on your involvement, what's it going to be worth when you're no longer around?

There's the other scenario, too – the one where you don't get to choose when you exit. Hopefully, it doesn't happen, but life throws us, from time to time, curve balls that spell the end of your career. Will your company continue to thrive? That depends on how closely its reputation is tied in with your involvement. Your company may be the clear leader in your marketplace, but without you, it may cease to exist in a year or two.


Having a strategic marketing partner provides an unbiased, third-party point of view. They can help articulate and grow your company's reputation, independently of you. Which in turn will increase your company's value upon your exit.

So if you're one of those business owners or CEOs who truly believes you make the company what it is and if you want the company to grow and exemplify your values and standards after you walk away, you need to move the spotlight off of you and shine it on the organization you've built.



There's a lot written about effective exit strategies, and that's a common topic in business magazines. You may already be thinking about an eventual change in ownership. If that's the case, you should also be thinking about some deliberate efforts to move you away from the center of the company's reputation.

If you're not afraid of being challenged, the right marketing partner can provide a candid assessment, with actual data, of your real reputation in the marketplace, then develop strategies to shift to a less you-centric image. The goal is to preserve the good elements you brought to your company and show how the team you created is building upon them. Handled successfully, this kind of approach can increase your team's morale and motivation, encourage your company's growth, and ensure its value will reward your exit appropriately.

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